

LIBRARY
29 NOV 2001



Welsh Economic Review

Volume 13.2 Autumn 2001

Produced in association with



© Welsh Economy Research Unit 2001
ISSN 0965-2450

The *Welsh Economic Review* is produced twice yearly, by the Welsh Economy Research Unit (WERU) at Cardiff Business School. The aim of the *Review* is to provide an authoritative and objective analysis of the Welsh economy in a manner that promotes understanding and informs decision-making. The 'core' section of the *Review* is written by members of WERU, with feature articles contributed by academics or practitioners within or outside Wales. The *Review* is circulated widely within Wales, to both private and public sector organisations, including the education sector and the National Assembly.

Notes for Contributors

Authors should send papers for potential publication in the *Welsh Economic Review* to the Editor at the address given below, preferably via e-mail in a Word for Windows format. Papers are welcome on any topic that would be of general interest to the readership, and should be written in a style suitable for non-specialist readers. Papers should be approximately 3,000-4,000 words and any graphs or figures should be accompanied by the underlying data to allow reproduction.

Articles will be refereed within WERU. The Copyright for articles published in the *Welsh Economic Review* will be retained by WERU.

Dr Annette Roberts,
Editor, *Welsh Economic Review*,
Welsh Economy Research Unit,
Cardiff Business School,
Aberconway Building,
Colum Drive,
Cardiff, CF10 3EU.

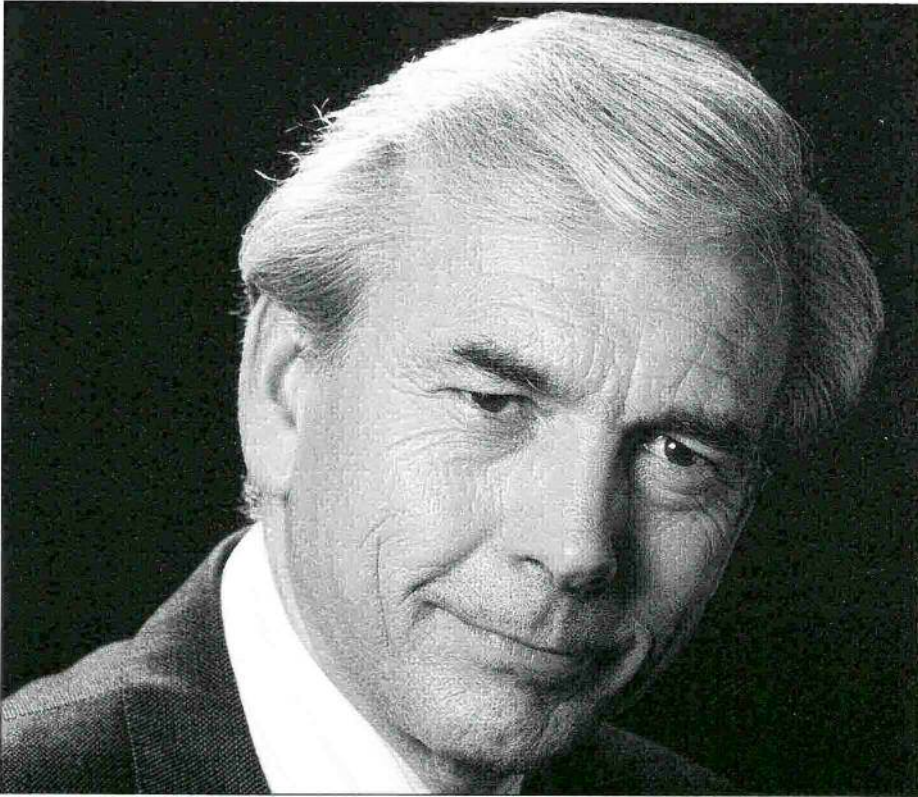
Tel 029 2087 4173
Fax 020 2087 4419

e-mail robertsa1@cardiff.ac.uk



**Interview
&
Feature
Articles**

Interview with John Humphrys



The *Welsh Economic Review* editorial team secured an electronic interview with Cardiff born BBC journalist John Humphrys.

John Humphrys started his career on the Penarth Times, moving to the South Wales Echo and then to the Western Mail, before moving to London. He has added his voice to the debate on agriculture, using his own experiences as a farmer in Wales, a role which he relinquished after starting on Radio 4's Today Programme.

The 'John Humphrys' problem satisfies the listener but causes consternation among politician 'victims' under interrogation on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. How do you maintain your objectivity under a barrage of disapproval, and how do you decide a correct balance between seeking the truth and offending your interviewees?

I wouldn't claim to be seeking the truth if only because one person's "truth" is another's fiction. If I knew what truth is I'd be in a philosophy department of a university and not a news operation. As to maintaining objectivity, that's easy. I ask questions in the same way that a lawyer asks questions in court. I may have my own views but they are left at the studio door. My role is mostly to play devil's advocate, and I am as happy arguing against my own views as with them. Most serious politicians accept that. I'm not sure there is a "barrage of disapproval". The audience seems to approve of my approach, at least judging by surveys and correspondence and reactions when I am attacked. In fact the only truly nasty attack on my objectivity from a serious politician came from Jonathan Aitken. What was that about truth?

The endless dissembling of politicians, and their over-exposure in all media have played parts in disenchanting the electorate. What do you think should be done to reawaken our political responsibilities?

I suspect that in as mature a democracy as this, there is a natural tendency to be disenchanted with politics. Most people get excited and want to become politically active only when they feel their way of life is under threat in some way or another. The low turnout at the last election was disappointing but probably more a reflection of the disappearance of ideology from our political parties.

As a farmer, and an author on farming, you have well known views, even visions on the future for farming in the UK and Wales. You would appear to favour the small farming unit and eschew large-scale intensive farming. How do you defend the perceived inefficiencies of the techniques you advocate?

They are precisely that: "perceived". Well-managed smaller farms are very efficient indeed. Yields on organic farms may be slightly lower than those on

farms with high chemical inputs, but you must balance the costs of those inputs against the slightly lower yield. There is also a great cost from highly intensive farming in both cleaning up pollution and damage to soil structure. Small, mixed farms are more labour intensive, but I would argue that in a country like Wales that is a blessing if we are to retain a viable rural infrastructure.

What lessons do you think we should have learned from the latest farming misfortune; foot-and-mouth disease?

We must reduce stocking on the hills. If farmers are forced (or tempted by subsidies) to overstock they cannot care for their livestock as well as they should. We must restore local slaughter houses. We must stop shipping animals around the country as though they were cans of beans, being sold for a pound or two extra profit hither and yon. We must re-establish the connection between the producer and the consumer.

The National Assembly is apparently attracted to the idea that Wales should be free of genetic experimentation and that we could develop a comparative advantage in organic farm products. Is this possibility or fantasy?

Of course it's possible - and immensely desirable. People don't want GM and if Wales can offer food free of GM, that's what we should do. Why should we jeopardise the environment to bolster the profits of a few multinationals? I'd like to take it a step further and see Wales as an organic farming nation.

What makes you proud to be Welsh and what makes you shudder?

I shudder at those Welsh people (mercifully few of them, I suspect) who want to "keep Wales for the Welsh" and regard the English as undesirable aliens. But I rejoice in our wonderful literary and musical heritage - and the fact that Welsh people are, by and large, kind-hearted and welcoming - Oh, and much brighter than the average. And maybe one day we'll be able to rejoice at our performance on the rugby field again. Or is that too much to hope for?

Do you think that Wales is only attractive to the unambitious, as a place to live?

Of course not. For myself, I have to be in London because that's where my job is. But Wales is full of ambitious and fulfilled men and women who have recognised that you don't need to live in a ghastly great city like this to prosper and (more importantly) to enjoy life. I shall come back one day.